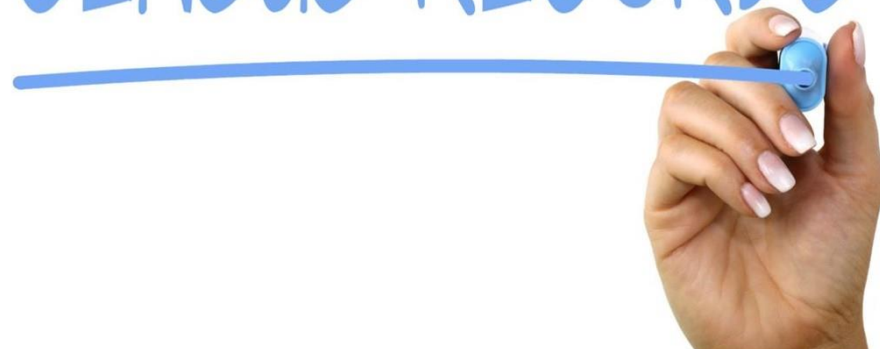


Guide to Using Census Records

CENSUS RECORDS



Introduction

The census has been taken every 10 years from 1790 to the present. It is a tool whose primary purpose has been to determine total population figures, not to identify individuals or facilitate family history. For this reason, it is not a perfect tool for genealogists, though it is extremely useful in many instances.

The different censuses can be divided into five overlapping categories:

1790-1840 -- Only heads of household are named.

1850-1860 -- All free persons are named (slaves are not).

1870-1930 -- All persons are named.

1790-1870 -- Census indexed in books.

1880-1930 -- Census indexed on microfilm (Soundex).

The census can be a powerful and flexible tool for genealogists or it can be a quick fix tool pointing the way to other information sources. Sometimes it is worthwhile to dig deep into the census, but at other times it may not be—it depends on the circumstances.

At a minimum, the census can be used to identify likely sources of information, by pinpointing a family in a given place (a county) at a given time (a specific year or range of years). One might then know where and when to look for other records—deeds, wills, marriages, etc. The census may also yield a detailed snapshot of a family by identifying

householders and their relation to one another. By scanning through the census microfilm, you can identify neighbors who are often kin, in-laws, and so on.

The US Census can be frustrating to use sometimes. One of the main reasons is that it can be hard to figure out which numbers on the census microfilm correspond to those in our 1) print indices (1790-1870) and 2) Soundex microfilm (1880-1930). Below you will find brief introductions to the use of print indices and Soundex cards, followed by page number clues for each census year.

Print Indices, 1790-1870

Generally the print indices are organized alphabetically by surname with county of residence and page number on the corresponding county reel indicated. Therefore, it is usually only necessary to find the ancestor, his/her county, and page number in the census index, then select the correct county census on microfilm for the year in question and look him or her up.

Censuses through 1840 identify only heads-of-household by name (other members of households are listed only in age and sex categories). Therefore, indices from 1790-1840 will only list heads-of-household. Indices from 1850-1870 may list non-heads, but it should not be assumed that these indices are complete lists of all non-heads identified in a given state census.

Some censuses have more than one page number per page. Try not to let that confuse you. In most of the censuses through 1870, the page number in the index will correspond to the printed number on the census -- 1860 is an exception, as the page number corresponding to the index is handwritten in that instance. Page number location can also vary, though upper right corner seems to be preferred. Usually, the page number appears every other page, though 1800 and 1860 are exceptions.

The 1790 census volumes are not indices to the microfilm (each volume is rather a published/printed version of the entire surviving census for a given state). The 1790 film for each state should be preceded by a table that lists counties in the order in which they appear on the film. This order differs from the published 1790 census. But the order of names within each county should be the same. Therefore, you can use the 1790 census book to approximate where a name will appear on the microfilm.

1800 index page # = printed # alternating in the upper right and lower right (and upside down) corners of every page.

1810 index page # = printed # in lower right corner of every other page.

1820 index page # does not correspond to page # on census page . . . good luck!

1830 index page # = printed # in upper right corner of every other page.

1840 index page # = printed # in upper right corner of every other page.

1850 index page # = printed # in upper right corner of every other page.

1860 index page # = handwritten #s in upper right and left corners of each page (usually).

1870 index page # = printed # in upper right corner of every other page.

Soundex Cards, 1880-1930

To look up individuals in the microfilmed 1880-1930 censuses, you must use the Soundex, a microfilmed card index that assigns codes to surnames based on the way they sound.

To begin, you first need to determine the Soundex code (a letter followed by three digits, e.g., C222) for the surname you are looking up. You can do this on the Web or you can calculate the code by hand. Soundex code numbers are arranged alphabetically for the entire state (county of residence is identified on each card). Within each code number, Soundex cards are arranged alphabetically by the head-of-household's first name.

When searching, keep in mind: 1) more than one surname usually shares a Soundex code, 2) first names of heads of household may be abbreviated with initials, and 3) several codes are occasionally bunched together in a confusing manner. Also, 1880 households without children may not have Soundex cards -- finding such a household may necessitate "reading the whole county".

Soundex cards identify variables such as county of residence, race, age, and sex for each member of a household, which may sometimes be adequate. To find ancestors in the census proper, you need to record some numbers from the Soundex card -- usually the enumeration district # (ed #), sheet #, and line # -- and use these to find the corresponding census page.

These numbers are sometimes quite confusing. Enumeration district and sheet numbers refer to numbers at the top of each sheet. The exception is the 1930 census where the sheet # on the Soundex card actually corresponds to a line # in the third column on the left hand side of the sheet. The 1930 census's ed # is also a bit odd. It consists of two numbers separated by a hyphen. Use the second one.

Line numbers refer to column numbers on the left side of each sheet. Column numbers (1-50) run only one sheet in the 1880 census, but two sheets (or 1-100) in the 1900 and 1920 censuses (thus, pp. A&B).

1880 ed # = ed #, sheet # = page #, line # = printed line # on far left (columnar 1-50).

1890 missing - destroyed by fire at the National Archives in 1922.

1900 ed # = ed #, sheet # = sheet #, line # = printed line # on far left (pp. A&B, columnar 1-100).

1910 Soundex for 1910 is computer printout called the Miracode, and ed #, sheet #, etc., are not identified. Use the last two of three numbers on the upper right. 2nd # = ed #, 3rd # = line # in column three under "location" (left side of sheet).

1920 ed # = ed #, sheet # = sheet #, line # = printed line # on far left (pp. A&B, columnar 1-100).

1930 ed# = 2nd ed # (e.g., 81-24), sheet # = handwritten line # on left side of page, fourth column under "place of abode" (or third column w/ numbers).

Soundex Coding Guide

Soundex codes are made up of the first letter of the surname, followed by three numbers. The numbers are assigned as follows:

The number represents the letters

1 = B, P, F, V

2 = C, S, K, G, J, Q, X, Z

3 = D, T

4 = L

5 = M, N

6 = R

The following letters are ignored:

A, E, I, O, U, W, Y and H

Double letters and side-by-side letters of the same number should be counted as one letter (e.g. Lloyd, Jackson, Gutierrez).

If there are not three consonants following the initial letter, use zeros to complete the three-digit code.

Examples:

Lee = L000

Jones = J520

Western = W236

Tymczak = T522

Names are arranged by Soundex code and then alphabetically by the first name.